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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 000871

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2015

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC EC

SUBJECT: ECUADOR: POLITICAL SITUATION UPDATE AS OF 2:45

P.M. ON 4/20/05

REF: A. QUITO 867

1B. QUITO 868

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: At 1:15 p.m., Congress voted to replace President Gutierrez with Vice President Alfredo Palacio. The military has announced the withdrawal of its support for President Gutierrez. Protests, which formerly met with police resistance, turned celebratory with news of Gutierrez's downfall. However, there were two deaths reported. Minister of Government Ayerbe publicly called for calm, announced ex-president Abdala Bucaram's imminent departure from Ecuador, and offered dialogue with the opposition as the Ambassador had recommended earlier to President Gutierrez. This signal of conciliation appears to have come too late. No incidents of violence have been reported by AmCits. As of 3 p.m., the President told the Ambassador he had left the palace and was on his way to an unnamed city in Ecuador. He seems to have accepted that his term is over. End Summary.

Security

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12. (C) As outlined in Ref A and previous reporting, the RSO initiated proactive security measures to protect USG personnel and property. These security initiatives were successful as even in the face of violent protests, there were no reported incidents against USG personnel or property.

Embassy Actions

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13. (C) The Ambassador got through to Joint Chief VADM Rosero at noon to urge restraint. Rosero said the military had withdrawn support to Gutierrez. The Ambassador told Rosero he must try again to convince Gutierrez to appeal to the people. Rosero said the situation was beyond that point and the military was considering creating a "civic junta" to replace the president temporarily. The Ambassador said that should the President resign any replacement must conform with the Constitution. Rosero said the military had no intention of taking political control itself.

14. (C) At 1:45 p.m., the Ambassador spoke with President Gutierrez who said he intended to appeal to the nation for support and calm. The Ambassador told him that if the military withdraws their support, Gutierrez would have to go. The President thanked the Ambassador for all her support.

15. (C) At 2:45 p.m., Gutierrez called the Ambassador again from the palace and still reluctant to resign. The Ambassador told him that she didn't see any other way out. He confirmed at 3 p.m. that he was leaving the palace, possibly to his hometown of Tena or Guayaquil. He did not request asylum and made no mention of leaving the country.

Government Response

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15. (U) At approximately 1 p.m., Government Minister Oscar Ayerbe publicly called for calm, said ex-president Bucaram would shortly depart the country, and called on all political factions to engage in dialogue.

16. (U) Press reported at 2:20 p.m. that President Gutierrez was seeking asylum in Panama. Other report indicate he may travel to Chile or Canada.

Congress

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17. (U) A rebel Congress, consisting of 62 opposition deputies, voted to replace Omar Quintana as President of Congress with Cynthia Viteri (PSC). They then voted to relieve President Gutierrez of his responsibilities and at 2:15 p.m. swore in Vice President Alfredo Palacio as the new President.

Military and Police

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18. (U) General Marco Cuvero has replaced Jorge Poveda as national police chief.

Economic Implications

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19. (U) Dollarization continues to insulate the Ecuadorian economy from political stability. Citibank and other contacts tell us that no run on the banks has occurred and that very little capital flight is underway. Citibank said only three of its clients have moved funds out of Ecuador so far. A very few were moving funds from local banks into Citi.

Next Steps

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-- PD: We are refraining from public comment about the evolving situation.

-- RSO: There will continue to be a curfew for Embassy employees and dependents in Quito this evening. Post continues to have additional ENP assets protecting the Embassy's perimeter. There have been no reported threats against AmCits and/or property at this time. The rest of the country is calm.

KENNEY